
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SETTLEMENT TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR IMMIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES
AT LOCAL INS OFFICE**

Chicago – Recently the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Office in Chicago and Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago settled a dispute in which Access Living alleged the Chicago Office discriminated against immigrants who are deaf and hard of hearing. The settlement agreement worked out in the case reflects the INS’ continuing effort to improve its services to immigrants, in general, and immigrants with disabilities, in particular. The agreement does not constitute an admission by the Chicago Office of any violation of federal law.

“The experience of going through the immigration process, whether it be obtaining a work authorization card, becoming a permanent resident, or the most gratifying of the benefits provided by the INS, becoming a United States citizen, can sometimes be a long and difficult process for many immigrants. That process can be even more difficult for immigrants with disabilities. For example, without a sign language interpreter, an immigrant who is deaf would not be able to complete the necessary interviews. We applaud the Chicago Office for recognizing the importance of access and committing resources to the cause,” said René David Luna, Access Living’s Immigrants with Disabilities Right’s Coordinator.

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Brian Perryman, District Director of the Chicago Office, explained “Providing quality

customer service to our clients has always been a top priority of the Chicago INS office, and one which I am fully committed to. While we have worked in the past at accommodating the particular needs of some of the immigrants that seek immigration benefits, we are open and eager to hearing from the local community on how we can better improve our services.”

To improve its services for immigrants with disabilities, the Chicago Office agreed to:

- Continue to ensure effective communication with immigrants who are deaf or hard of hearing and provide sign language interpreters during interviews and the oath ceremony;
- Continue to maintain its TTY phones (phones used by individuals who are deaf) and check and respond to calls on a daily basis;
- Install Power Point presentations in certain waiting areas to provide basic information about immigration procedures. These have already been installed;
- Post signs throughout waiting areas advising immigrants who need an accommodation to notify a Chicago Office official. These signs have already been posted;
- Enclose a form regarding the right to request an accommodation with interview notices mailed to immigrants;
- Provide, with advance notice, accommodations that are reasonable when it initiates meetings with the public; and
- Continue to provide annual training to its staff on disability sensitivity issues.

“These actions will improve access to immigration services for the disabled,” said Luna. “It will enable immigrants with disabilities to pursue the dream of citizenship and other immigration benefits on equal footing with other immigrants.”

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Governed and staffed by a majority of people with disabilities, Access Living is

Chicago's Center for Independent Living. Access Living works toward the full equality, inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities.

For more information, please contact Gary Arnold at Access Living, 312.253.7000 ext. 199 (voice), 312.253.7002 (tty), or Marilú Cabrera and Gail Montenegro at the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 312.385.1925.

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